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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001406

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [KU](#) [NATIONAL ASSEMBLY](#)

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT VS. THE PRIME MINISTER: GRILLING FORCES
CABINET RESHUFFLE, PM THREATENS ASSEMBLY DISSOLUTION

REF: A. KUWAIT 1373

[B. KUWAIT 1349](#)

Classified By: CDA Matthew Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary and Comment: Caving in to pressures heightened by the grilling and proffered resignation of Health Minister Dr. Mohammed Al-Jarallah on April 2, the Government this week replaced two Ministers, and pondered a third, all in four days. These actions were followed by a statement issued April 6 interpreted by many as a precursor to the dissolution of the National Assembly. The turmoil comes as the country remains seized with debate over an expected National Assembly vote extending political rights to women, an issue upon which Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed has staked his credibility and that of his government. Should the Amir call for dissolution of the National Assembly, a Constitutional prerogative last exercised in 1999, it is expected that Amiri decrees granting women voting rights, permitting women to register to vote and calling for new elections will be issued forthwith, effectively bringing about a GOK fait accompli. That the PM would risk losing face replacing Ministers, however, may indicate that he intends to leave the National Assembly as is, meeting the challenge posed by unruly MPs with a new cabinet, hand-selected for loyalty, reshuffled on a piecemeal basis. The dissolution of the National Assembly is a valid constitutional right that poses no threat to Kuwait's democratic rule. Such action is fully consistent with Kuwait's constitution. End Summary and Comment.

New Information Minister Already Threatened With Grilling

¶12. (C) New Information Minister Dr. Anas Al-Rasheed took office April 2, filling the vacancy left when the former minister, Shi'ite Mohammed Abulhassan, resigned rather than face grilling in January 2005. Upon Al-Rasheed's assumption of office, Islamist MP Faisel Al-Mislem publicly admonished him, threatening a grilling over the same issues that contributed to Abulhassan's downfall: allowing coed public concerts and approving books deemed offensive to Islamists. While Al-Rasheed's appointment was publicly praised (ref. B), privately, Public Affairs contacts questioned the wisdom of the appointment. Neither an Islamist nor a Shiite, Al-Rasheed enters office without a pre-existing political constituency, earning PM Shaykh Sabah no political capital and making his position potentially untenable should grilling threats arise again. (Note: Kuwait has traditionally had at least one Shiite in the cabinet. Abulhassan's resignation left the cabinet without a Shiite member for the first time since 1962. End Note.)

Minister of Finance Resignation Accepted, New Minister Named

¶13. (C) More than a year after it was tendered, PM Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed accepted the resignation of Finance Minister Mahmoud Al-Nouri on April 3, announcing his replacement, former Director of the Kuwait Fund for Arab and Economic Development (KFAED) Bader Mishari Al-Humaidhi the same day. (ref. A) The replacement of the Finance Minister -- ostensibly for health reasons -- was seen by many as a defeat for the Prime Minister, who had stubbornly refused to accept Al Nouri's resignation following the latter's March 2004 parliamentary grilling, despite Al-Nouri's wishes to the contrary. The new Minister was reportedly also threatened with a grilling on his first day in office.

Call for Vote of No Confidence Fells Health Minister

¶14. (C) Making good on prior threats, tribal, Islamist MP Daifalla Buramiya grilled Health Minister Mohammed Al-Jarallah during the April 4 session of the National Assembly, precipitating a call by a diverse coalition of 10 MP's for a vote of no-confidence against the Minister. The grilling, in which charges of negligent management, poor security and deteriorating public health were leveled, carried sectarian overtones; Buramiya's Awazim tribe and the Parliament's Shiite bloc both find themselves without a Minister from their ranks. All five Shiite MPs were among those who called for a vote of no confidence. Calling the

political climate "very negative" and accusing his critics of "factional intentions," Al-Jarallah tendered his resignation as Minister of Health in the early hours of April 5. Speculation among Embassy contacts indicates that Shi'ite MP Yousef Al-Zalzalah may be a leading candidate to fill this vacancy should the PM accept the resignation.

Al-Sabah Hold Ministerial Meeting; PM Admonishes Assembly

15. (C) Following widespread speculation in April 5 local dailies that the Prime Minister was on the verge of dissolving the National Assembly, contacts close to the ruling family told Emboffs that the Prime Minister had called an emergency meeting of senior Al-Sabah family members that same evening at his home. The following day, the Prime Minister issued a statement criticizing MP's for "undermining cooperation between the Legislative and the Executive powers," citing "the style followed in withdrawing confidence from the Minister of Health," whom the PM defended in a 2004 grilling. Shaykh Sabah called on Members of Parliament to practice their constitutional rights, "far away from these negative practices for the sake of the supreme interest of the country.

PM's Power Questioned; Parliament's Fate Uncertain

16. (C) Embassy contacts reported that the resignation of Al-Jarallah exposed a new weakness of PM Shaykh Sabah in his dealings with the National Assembly. One year ago, a no-confidence vote against Finance Minister Al-Nouri seemed certain after a marathon grilling, but his resignation was averted by Shaykh Sabah's intervention. This time, contacts said, Shaykh Sabah wanted to save Al-Jarallah but could not. The flurry of ministerial appointments indicates that Shaykh Sabah does not intend to dissolve the current National Assembly. Embassy contacts, however, suggest that Shaykh Sabah acts impulsively and may consider the resignation of the Health Minister a challenge and lash out against the Assembly by arranging for its dissolution.

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